





CANOE NEW HAVEN

# Mill River Canoe Guide

## Mill River

The Mill River sits alongside East Rock, a large, trap-rock ridge weathered to a lovely shade somewhere between burnt orange and deep rose. During the early years of New Haven history, the river meandered through a floodplain unfettered. In 1798, Eli Whitney, inventor of the cotton gin, built his musket factory on the banks of the Mill, changing the river and industrial manufacturing forever. In 1880, the rock, the river and surrounding land became part of East Rock Park. The park is known as one of the best birding sites in Connecticut. More than 200 species of birds have been recorded in East Rock Park, many of which are rarely seen anywhere else in the state.

### Canoeing Info

**Canoe Zone:** The covered bridge at the Eli Whitney Museum to before the tide gates at U.S. Rte 91.

**Length:** Three miles round trip

**Access Points:** At the Eli Whitney Museum on the west bank, off of Whitney Ave. and at the Orange Street bridge on the west bank near Wilbur Cross High School

### Canoeing Tips

1. The water level changes hourly because the Mill is a tidal river. There is a noticeable current so paddling upstream will take longer.
2. Be aware of the tide gates near U.S. Rte 91 and Walker Rink. They are impassable.
3. Parts of the river are environmentally sensitive and should not be disturbed. These areas are clearly marked on the map.

## Things to See and Do

The sheer face of East Rock dominates the upper stretch of the Mill River. Viewing East Rock from the river is always a unique experience, depending on the time of day and the sunlight. In early morning, East Rock is a light grayish color, whereas it turns a deep rose during sunset. The summit of East Rock can be reached by numerous hiking trails within the park and provides spectacular views from the top. Look for turkey vultures and hawks soaring on the thermals.

Birdwatching on the Mill River offers a great opportunity to see a wide diversity of species. Both the magnificent black-crowned and green-backed herons can be seen in the upper part of the river. Depending on the season, you can also expect to see kingfishers, red-winged blackbirds, and numerous species of ducks and other nesting birds. The spring warbler migration, which includes over 20 species, is worth seeing.

Passing under the footbridge, you can people watch or examine the various plant species along the banks, from willow trees that shade the river to bullrushes, reeds and lily pads. Below Orange Street, the river becomes wider and slower with fewer bends. Phragmites dominates the riverbanks and the adjacent marsh, where canoeists may be able to see muskrats and occasionally other small mammals like otters, foxes and raccoons.

Fishing is permitted and is excellent throughout the river system. Near the Whitney Dam, you'll find two-inch-long sticklebacks, carp, white perch, killifish, and mummichog, and you can occasionally spot painted and snapping turtles sunning on logs and on the banks. You also might be able to catch yellow perch, bluegills, eels, and large mouth bass. Blue crabs are abundant and can easily be found during the summer.

### Safety Tips

1. Always wear a life jacket, even if you're a good swimmer
2. Don't rock or stand up in the canoe
3. If your boat flips, stay with the canoe
4. Watch out for brush, fallen trees and other objects that could capsize your canoe
5. In an emergency, grab anything that floats
6. Always paddle directly into or away from the wake of larger boats